Petits Propos Culinaires (print) ISSN 0142-7857
Petits Propos Culinaires (online) ISSN 3029-0651

mark on food and drink. Then on to Roman Greece – where Greeks were reckoned to be the best cooks – and Byzantine Greece with its legacy of sweet wines, then through the period of Turkish rule and on to the emergence of modern Greece, a nation state with ways of dining and festivity that are unique to Greece, enlivened with timeless Greek conviviality. The final section focuses on local regional cuisine and the modern food traditions of the country as a whole, and on finding good food in Greece today – or cooking and eating it yourself at home. *Gifts of the Gods* is beautifully produced, with many well-chosen illustrations. This food and drink Odyssey blends erudition and enjoyment in equal measure, and is highly recommended.

Kaori O'Connor

Nicole Tarulevicz: *Eating Her Curries and Kway: A Cultural History of Food in Singapore*: University of Illinois Press, 2013: 224 pp., hardback with 10 b/w illus., £34.

This engaging academic study of food in Singapore is a superb example of the way food can be used to unravel the complexities of modern postcolonial identities. This work emerges from the vigorous Australian school of food studies, which has done so much to introduce cultural and racial nuances and new understandings of nationalism, cosmopolitanism and the processes of globalization to the field.

Academic studies of modern Singapore have focussed on its dramatic economic transformation since independence, becoming the leading business hub of the Asia Pacific region. Building on and extending the work of the anthropologist Arjun Appadurai on food and nationality, this is the first detailed study of the national cuisine that is a direct outcome of Singapore's transition, and also an element of its success.

A small island 247 miles square off the Malay Peninsula, Singapore was an isolated and intermittent trading outpost used successively by Sumatrans, Muslim traders, the Portuguese, the Dutch and then the British East India Company in 1819, finally becoming a British Crown Colony in 1858. Trade continued to define Singapore, leading to inward labour migrations of Chinese from the Straits and later from mainland China, bringing distinctive ingredients, techniques and dishes. Along with people from India also with culinary baggage, the immigrants soon outnumbered the original Malay population, with Chinese prevailing numerically from the 1840's. However, in a familiar empire scenario, for a long time representations of food in Singapore ignored migrant and local cuisine in favour of white colonial images – notably gin cocktails in the Long Bar at Raffles Hotel – and aspirational British cookery highly inappropriate for the tropical climate, made of imported ingredients and requiring cooking in ovens which most Asian households did not possess. Singapore passed successively through the colonial period, Japanese occupation

during World War II, a postwar interval, a merger with Malaysia in 1963 which formally ended the colonial period, then a separation from Malaysia in 1965 and full independence for Singapore, followed by a rapid and even brutal transition from third world to modern state under Lee Kuan Yew. The new nation needed a national cuisine to unify it and promote a consolidated image – a way of 'eating the nation' with every meal – but how was this accomplished in a place with such a complex history and diverse population?

Tarulevicz demonstrates how the answer turned out to be hybridization or fusion, a process that the writer Christopher Tan calls 'the product of many different lives lived and cultured side by side' over many generations, resulting in distinctive adaptations and combinations. Dishes and ingredients from all the migrant groups were fused and modified, emerging as noodle dishes, curries, soups, and sambals. Among the best known of the first are Laksa, Fried Hokkien Mee, Char Kway Teo (the 'Kway' of the title) and Wonton Mee – familiar now on restaurant menus around the world as authentic 'Singapore' foods although their origins are diverse. If you have ever wondered why 'Singapore' cooking is reminiscent of Chinese, Indian and SE Asian yet somehow different, this book explains it. Although 'fusion' foods were once regarded as inauthentic in food studies, the Singapore case shows that hybridity can become authenticity over time, in response to changing social and historical circumstances. Nonya or Peranakan cuisine, a combination of Chinese and Malay cookery dating from the early colonial era, 'fusion before the phrase was even coined' as one Nonya cookbook puts it, holds a special place in the Singapore food hierarchy because it shows that cultural mixing has always been a part of the Singapore food experience. There are also some reinvented elements, as in the case of hawker street food, once outlawed for health reasons, now reintroduced in sanitized form to affirm Singapore's culinary identity and also as a draw for food tourism.

In a book that is fascinating, well-researched and full of material that will be new to western readers, Tarulevicz demonstrates how ideas about the island's food heritage helped and continue to help Singaporeans negotiate the multiracial demography and complex social constraints of modern Singapore, giving a great deal of pleasure to Western eaters in the process. This is a book that all serious food historians and those interested in the popular material culture of modern Asia should read and own.

Kaori O'Connor